

Thoughts before my next trip away to find a curve bending bull to produce meat for the market!

How important are head/bone/jaw?

Compare the Angus Stud industry with the sheep and dairy industries. The two latter have made significant progress over the last two decades. Meanwhile any genetic progress made in the Angus beef traits such as calf weight and calving % has been offset by increases in cow weight. In other words, productivity per kg of cow run has not improved significantly in 30 years.

In the buyer and breeders' eyes, good looks (phenotype) so often overrides the far more significant traits all of which are measurable. I am talking about carcass traits (eye muscle, fat and leanness etc), fertility, calving ease, mature cow weights.

Sure, structure is hard to measure too, and enormously important. Without good foot settings a bull will not cover the hills and successfully mate his cows. Without good hip to pin length and good hocks a bull will damage his back during mating. Without a good tight sheath a bull can damage his penis when he is out on the job. As Stud Breeders, we should be vigilant in eliminating such faults from our cattle if we are to protect the commercial herds from them.

And what about a bull's fertility? Capacity testing is measurable. Fertility of daughters is a significant trait and relates directly to the breeding bull. (After all, all profitability starts with a calf.) That is measurable. And early maturing, essential to the breed, is measurable.

These are all functional attributes and I believe the Angus breed is a functional one that is going from strength to strength in the modern commercial world. Forget about head, jaw and bone! We need to produce meat – on animals with structure to withstand the environment that they run on. We must maintain and enhance its carcass characteristics which are so important in the market place.

It's worth a thought or two when you are next buying your bull.... It's certainly worth a thought as I go to look at the great pool of cattle in the USA this March. We will see about 3000 bulls and when we like one, we will search out his family, offspring and owner!

I am exploring the American Cattle to maintain the progress that we have made during the last several years. We have maintained our medium sized cattle, hardy and fertile while adding significantly to the carcass traits. We are using top home bred sons back over the cows to maintain the lines and keep the type even, but there is still room for consistent production of carcass, and that is done through depth of pedigree. This can not be found in New Zealand where numbers are so few and the pedigrees all so similar. We will get that from the USA.

It is impossible to get progress without change.